

Structured Oral Interview (SOI) Orientation and Preparation Guide

THE PUBLIC SAFETY SELECTION SPECIALISTS™



Milwaukee Fire Department

Industrial/Organizational Solutions, Inc.
February 2009

Candidate Orientation and Preparation Guide

This guide has been designed to inform you about and to help you prepare for the structured oral interview (the SOI) for the Milwaukee Fire Department's hiring process. In this guide, you will learn about the SOI, the types of questions you may encounter while participating in the SOI, and instructions and tips that will help you to do your best on the day of the assessment.

Be sure to read this entire guide carefully. Understanding how the SOI will be conducted and knowing what to expect during the process should increase your ability to perform well during the assessment.

Good luck to you as you participate in this selection process!

The Structured Oral Interview

The SOI consists of a series of questions that will assess the skills and abilities necessary to perform as a firefighter in the Milwaukee Fire Department. The questions will not assess knowledge of firefighting. All candidates will answer the same questions in the same order. These questions will include hypothetical scenarios and how you would deal with them.

You will be given a specific arrival time for your interview. You must arrive on time for your interview. We suggest that you arrive at the site and check-in at least ten minutes early. On the day of your SOI, you will first check in at the main entrance and then you will be directed to a test review room. Here you will first complete some necessary paperwork. You will then be given specific written instructions for the SOI, a copy of the SOI questions, and one sheet of blank paper. You will have approximately 15 minutes to read the instructions and interview questions. During this time you should familiarize yourself with the questions and prepare any notes on the paper provided to aid you in answering the SOI questions. To save time during the actual interview, the questions will not be read to you. Thus, it is important that you read the questions during this pre-interview preparation period and prepare yourself to answer the questions during the interview. When it is time for your interview, you will go to an assessment room to deliver your responses in the same order as the questions have been presented to you in writing (you will answer Question #1, then Question #2, then Question #3, etc.) You may refer to the questions and any notes you have prepared while delivering your responses.

The interview will be administered by a proctor and you will be videotaped during the SOI assessment. The SOI proctor will seat you and provide an introductory statement. You will then be asked to provide your answer to each question. Again, it is important to note that the proctor will not read the questions to you. You will have a copy of the interview questions in front of you as well as your notes. It is your responsibility to read the questions during the pre-interview preparation period. You must remain seated in the assessment room while delivering your responses so that you are fully captured on the camera.

You will be allowed a fixed amount of time (e.g., several minutes) to answer each question. Your response to each question will be timed with a timer. Each specific time limit will be presented with the written copy of the questions. If you have completed your response before the time is up for that question, you may announce that you are finished with that question. On the other hand, if you have not completed your response in the allotted time, you must stop and move on to the next question. In such a case, the proctor will tell you that your time has ended for that question. This format will continue until you have responded to all of the interview questions. You will not be allowed to ask for clarification regarding questions, and the interview proctor will not ask you to clarify answers that are incomplete or confusing. Therefore, you must be prepared to answer the questions to the best of your ability with the information given in the question. You will not be allowed to give introductory statements or present extra material during the interview.

After you have completed all interview questions you will check out with the interview administrator and also check out at the main desk where you first checked in. You must then leave the building immediately.

The Assessors

Your performance during the assessment process will be evaluated by a panel of assessors, who understand the essential duties and critical skills and abilities of firefighters. The assessors have been trained to evaluate your responses to the questions. Assessors will not be present in the room with you during your SOI. They will rate your responses from the video recording of your session at a later time.

Areas of Measurement

The oral assessment is designed to assess the most critical job-related skills and abilities. Dimensions that may be assessed in the oral assessment include the following: oral communication skills, situational judgment, ability to deal with the public, cooperativeness and teamwork, initiative, integrity, and conscientiousness, and ability to work under pressure. Your responses will not require knowledge of department procedures or specific firefighting knowledge.

Preparation

Here are a few steps you can take to prepare for the structured oral assessment:

- Practice reading questions with multiple parts, taking a few notes about the questions being asked and then answering all parts of the questions. Practice questions could involve such topics as how you would handle problematic situations or communicate with others.

- Make an audio and/or video tape of your practice session or watch yourself practice in a mirror. Identify any distracting mannerisms that you may have and try to correct them. While a proctor will be present during your interview, you will be videotaped for the purposes of rating. We suggest that you practice beforehand to become accustomed to this situation.
- You also might conduct an interview session with a friend or family member.
- Familiarize yourself with the common duties performed in the position. For example you may review the duties listed on the Firefighter job announcement bulletin at <http://www.city.milwaukee.gov/jobs/Firefighter> . You will be asked questions regarding how you will handle certain hypothetical situations that relate to the firefighting profession. Such questions do not require knowledge of firefighting, but understanding the job and the context of the question may be helpful in providing strong answers.

Suggestions for Responding to the Oral Interview Questions

- During the test review period, you should formulate an organized response to each question. Having organized and well thought out responses to the questions will enable you to perform better on the examination. You will be able to make notes during the review period and refer to them as you answer the questions. Keep in mind that there is a time limit for each question and when the time limit is reached you will have to end your response to that question. Answer the question as it is written. It is common for interview candidates to answer a question other than the one posed. Interviews are stressful, and it is not uncommon for a candidate to misunderstand or misinterpret the question and then provide an answer that is completely off-base. Be sure to carefully read the question and provide an answer for that specific question. Do not go outside the bounds of the question or ramble on about unrelated issues.
- Provide a complete response to each question. It is common for a candidate to answer a question and repeat the same answer over and over. Offer an answer that is complete but do not reiterate your response multiple times. Keep your answer concise but ensure that you provide a comprehensive response to the question that is posed.
- Ensure that you answer each question fully within the time limit.
- The panel will rate each question separately. Therefore, if your answer to a question seems to overlap with your response to a previous question, you should repeat any pertinent information to receive credit toward that question.
- Be sure to speak loudly and clearly enough for the microphone in the camera to record your response.

Assessment-Day Instructions and Tips

The following are instructions and advice that will help you on the day of the assessment:

- Arrive ten minutes early for the SOI. **If you are late you may not be allowed to take the test.** Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the site. During the test review process, you will be provided with basic instructions and the interview questions. This is the only time you will have to review the questions. Thus, ensure you arrive on time!
- **Do not** bring cellular phones, pagers, or other electronic devices to the test site.
- Bring a state issued photo identification card, e.g., driver's license
- As with all interviews, it is recommended that you dress appropriately. You should also dispose of any gum, candy or mints before the interview.

Test Security Issues

You will be competing with a number of other candidates for the position. Any information you divulge about the structure of the assessment, specific questions or any other SOI information could provide another candidate with an unfair advantage. In addition, this is a violation of Fire and Police Commission Rules. You must keep the content and structure of the oral assessment confidential. By participating in this process, you must agree not to divulge information about the nature of the questions or the manner in which they are administered, even after the week of testing is over. At the test site you will be asked to sign a Candidate Confidentiality Agreement. Important: all interview preparation material such as your notes, instructions and questions) will be collected before you leave the exam room. You **must not** take any material with you (including the notes you have taken during the test review period).